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Attendees: See Attached List

Date/Time: 3/29/00 7:00pm

Project No.: 50885

Place: McLaughlin Middle School

Re: Manchester Public Officials I-93 Salem to  
Manchester

Notes taken by: Bruce Tasker

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**Jeff Brillhart explained the Background and Purpose of the Project**

This project involves at constructing improvements along I-93 between state line Salem and the I-93 I-293 split in Manchester, a distance of approximately 18 miles or so.

The Department is proposing to widen the north and southbound barrels from the existing two lanes in each direction to three or four lanes in each direction. In addition, the five interchanges along this section of I-93 would be reconstructed or otherwise improved.

The project is a part of the State's Ten-Year Transportation Improvement Program. It was included in the original Ten-Year Plan adopted back in 1986.

The Department first began looking at what might be needed along the corridor in 1988 and 89. As the Department proceeded, the Environmental Resource Agencies indicated that a much more in-depth environmental study would be necessary to consider all alternatives and justify the proposed widening. In 1991, the Department agreed to conduct the highest level of study, an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).

The EIS was underway in 1992, and at that point questions were raised as to the Department's methodology for projecting future traffic volumes on I-93 and how improvements to I-93 interfaced with the rest of the transportation network in NH. The outcome of the discussion was to have a consultant create a Statewide Transportation Corridor Model.

By 1998, the model was nearing completion, the Department hired VHB to do the engineering and provide overall coordination for the EIS.

Over the last 2 years, base mapping has been updated; existing environmental (natural, cultural, socio-economic) resources have been cataloged, mapped, and evaluated; the model has been calibrated and traffic data has been developed; and the overall background information put together so that alternatives can be considered in a reasonable way.

The purpose of the project is to improve transportation efficiency and reduce safety problems associated with this 18-mile segment of I-93. Options include reactivating rail service; improving

bus service and other Transportation Demand Management Strategies (like Park & Ride accommodations, Intelligent Transportation Systems technology), widening the highway and improving the interchanges.

I-93 is a major interstate highway, and perhaps the major transportation link in NH. It is vital to NH's social and economic well being and it is in need of being improved.

The highway has a theoretical capacity to carry in the vicinity of 60,000 to 70,000 vpd. In the Salem area, the highway currently carries over 100,000 vpd. By 2020, the projected volumes are approximately 140,000 vpd. The projected volumes are on the conservative side; that is they are low in comparison to earlier projections.

Regardless, the highway is beyond being over capacity. The amount of traffic results in the highway being less forgiving and consequently less safe. The demand on the corridor requires consideration of significant improvements. This study is intended to provide a thorough review of the issues, options, and ramifications, so that the State can move forward with constructing the necessary improvements.

### **Tony Grande discussed the Regional Map and 400 scale base plans and project issues**

#### **Regional Location Map**

- The map shows surrounding towns and major roadways east and west of I-93.
- The segment under study begins at the NH/MA state line and proceeds approximately 18 miles to the I-293/I-93 split.
- Also shown on the map are 3 existing and one potential rail corridor:
  - the West corridor is the existing rail line from Lowell, MA, north through Nashua, Merrimack, Bedford and up to Manchester,
  - the East corridor is the abandoned M&L rail line and it extends from Lawrence, MA, north through Salem, Windham, Derry, Londonderry and up to Manchester;
  - the Portland to Boston rail corridor through Dover, Exeter, Plaistow to Lawrence MA. This existing rail corridor currently under reconstruction and service is expected to begin in Jan. 2001;
  - an I-93 median rail corridor alternative is proposed.

#### **400 Scale Map**

The 400 scale base map and color coding shows the existing conditions (existing pavement, existing buildings, right of way, etc) and resources (wetlands, open water, potential historic districts and structures, etc). The map begins at the MA/NH state line and proceeds northerly for approx. 18 miles through the Towns of Salem, Windham, Derry, Londonderry and Manchester, ending at the I-93/I-293 split.

#### **Existing Conditions / Problem areas**

- Highway was built in the 1960's and consequently has substandard geometrics and components in areas.(cable guard rail; 4' inside shoulder )
- Back ups currently occur along the mainline traveling SB in the morning and NB in the evening particularly in the southern half of the corridor.
- Back ups also occur at several interchange locations where the interchange is unable to process the volumes of traffic and traffic backs up onto the highway. Of particular concern is the Exit 3 NB off ramp and the Exit 5 SB off ramp.
- The congestion is the result of the highway at, or exceeding capacity.
- Weaving/merging traffic at Exit 2 SB is a problem.

- Acceleration and deceleration areas are inadequate in length for on and off ramps; a longer transition would allow drivers more time and give a better comfort level getting on and off the highway.

#### Recent Roadway and Bridge Work Completed in the I-93 Corridor

- Exit 1 NB lane addition as part of the Rockingham Mall development (1990) added capacity.
- Salem rest area reconstruction (1993) improved facility capacity and access.
- Exit 4 interchange reconstruction (1990) added capacity.
- Weigh stations in Windham currently under construction to improve truck safety.
- Windham Bridge over 111A (replaced 1994)
- Windham – Bridges over North Lowell Road (replaced 1994/96)
- Derry – Bridges over Fordway Extension (widened & rehab – 1996)
- Derry – Bridges over Kendall Pond Road (widened & rehab – 1996)
- Londonderry – Bridges over Stonehenge Road (replaced 1994/95)
- Manchester – Bridges over Cohas Brook and Bodwell Road (widened & rehab – construction underway)

Three types of environmental resources to be evaluated include natural, cultural, socio-economic resources. Secondary impacts (those which occur as an indirect result of constructing an improved highway system) are also of concern and will be evaluated.

Some of the potential resource concerns that have been identified to date, include:

- Property impacts (and noise impacts) where buildings/neighborhoods/commercial developments are close to I-93 or interchange areas.
- Porcupine Brook/Prime Wetlands - Salem
- Potential flood issues - Salem
- Canobie Lake – Drinking water supply - Windham
- Cobbetts Pond residential and recreational area -Windham
- Archaeological (median) & Historic Resources (Searles Castle-Windham)
- Prime Wetlands – Derry
- Cohas Brook – Manchester

#### The range of alternatives to be evaluated for this project:

- No Build – used as baseline for comparison.
- TSM Improvements; projects that can enhance safety and provide some congestion relief, generally within the ROW (adding or extending turn lanes, providing or improving traffic signals, employing Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS) technology).
- Widen I-93 to 6 or 8 lanes.
- Widen I-93 to 8 lanes w/HOV (High Occupancy Vehicle), lanes for vehicles w/2 or more passengers.
- TDM Strategies- opportunities which reduce demand on the highway system (i.e. park & ride lots, ridesharing, transit bus and train- including consideration of an I-93 median rail corridor for a passenger only rail service with possible stations located at Exits 2,3,4,5).

#### Jeff Brillhart Reviewed the Project Process and Schedule

There are three stages a project goes through once it is on the State's Ten-Year Transportation Improvement Program. These are:

1. Preliminary Design and Environmental Documentation and approval of a layout.
2. Final Design and Purchase of Right-of-Way.
3. Construction.

The project is currently in the first Stage – Preliminary Design and Environmental Documentation.

Within the Preliminary Design and Environmental Documentation stage, there are typically five phases:

1. Scoping Phase – data collection and issues identification.
2. Alternatives Phase – develop and screen conceptual alternatives.
3. Detail Alternatives Phase – develop detailed alternatives.
4. Environmental Documentation and Public Hearing Phase – develop draft environmental documentation and hold Public Hearing.
5. Finalize Environmental Document and Obtain Approvals Phase.

The Department is just completing the Scoping Phase (data collection and issues identification) and is proceeding forward with the Alternatives Phase (developing conceptual alternatives).

The completion of the Scoping Phase will be signified by the publication of the Scoping Report, due out in May.

The completion of the Alternatives Phase will be signified by the publication of the Rationale Report, due out January 2001.

Completion of the Draft EIS and the holding of the Public Hearing are scheduled for January 2002, and approvals are scheduled for January 2003. Construction will begin in early 2004.

An ATF committee has been established to review issues and information periodically through the study process. Each Community has appointed two members and the two Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPO) have appointed one member each. The first meeting is March 22<sup>nd</sup> in Manchester. Subsequent meetings will occur about every 6 weeks, in the various towns along the route.

The next series of Public Official meetings are anticipated to be held in August/September of this year at which conceptual designs will be available.

**Jeff opened the meeting up to questions:**

Comment. What is the likelihood that homes or property will be acquired in Manchester?

Jeff. The project is still in the preliminary stages and the Department has not determined what impacts are likely at this time. The Department has recently advertised a project for bridge and roadway improvements to I-93 in the vicinity of Bodwell Road. Construction will be underway this spring. The project will involve a very long retaining wall, which will allow all construction to remain within the existing ROW. A sound barrier will be developed on top of the wall to reduce potential noise impacts. The project was developed with the I-93 widening in mind, so the

Department is reasonable confident the additional widening of I-93 SB will not require the acquisition of homes.

Comment. Are the proposed improvements at Bodwell /I-93 temporary construction or permanent?

Jeff. The construction will be permanent. It should be noted that, early on, the Department tried to accommodate additional widening at the bridges for those bridges needing reconstruction along this section of I-93. The idea was resisted by the resource agencies because it was thought the widenings would dictate the location of the future I-93 improvements prior to having a corridor study. As the bridge projects continued, the resource agencies agreed that this may not be such a problem, and the Department was able to over-widen some of the structures to accommodate traffic control conditions during construction and have additional width for the future widening of I-93. This is the case at Bodwell Road. The resource agencies have allowed the Department to construct improvements westerly to stay away from the Cohas Brook which is in the median. The Department is hopeful that the future improvements related to the I-93 widening will also remain within the existing right-of-way. More about the actual design will be known later this summer/fall.

Comment. Alderman: Where would the rail alternative start in Manchester?

Jeff. This project is primarily concerned about the widening of I-93 and not a study to bring rail to Manchester. However, it is prudent that consideration be given to what might be needed to accommodate future rail options. The Department is looking at three rail options. A westerly corridor (currently provides freight services only) is being evaluated by the Department for passenger rail opportunities from Lowell to Nashua and Merrimack and perhaps to Manchester. This is actually a separate project independent of the I-93 study. The Department is optimistic about the possibility for future passenger rail services from Manchester to Nashua to Lowell to Boston. A second existing rail corridor being evaluated is east of I-93, and connects Manchester, Derry, and Salem to Lawrence and Boston. The corridor is not active, portions of this corridor have been sold, and the existing infrastructure is generally unacceptable. Reactivating this corridor would be extremely difficult. The third option involves providing rail within the I-93 corridor. The Department proposes to consider the possibility of both widening I-93 and providing future rail service in the highway corridor. The Department wants to study this idea and identify what the ramifications are of such an option. The Department feels that improvements to I-93 should not preclude the possibility of rail in the highway corridor in the future. Because the west rail line might provide better opportunities for linkage to Manchester, the I-93 rail option may possibly end at Exit 5 or at the airport. Deciding which rail corridor and developing plans that are more detailed will require some future rail study be completed.

Comment. How realistic is a rail line down the median? As the Department widens the highway, portions of the median will not be available for rail, correct?

Jeff. The Department is studying highway improvements in combination with providing for the possibility of rail service to determine what the resultant footprint and impacts would be. From a transportation perspective, planning for the I-93 corridor should consider a wide range of options.

Comment. Is the Department considering light rail as oppose to traditional rail in the I-93 corridor?

- Jeff. The Department is looking at a light rail option in the I-93 corridor, as light rail provides additional flexibility relative to grade and horizontal geometry.
- Comment. Is the Department proposing to connect the west rail option to the Massachusetts rail system?
- Jeff. The Department is working with Massachusetts to provide rail service between Nashua and Lowell. Nashua and Merrimack would be the first steps in reviving commuter rail service in New Hampshire, and perhaps Manchester would be connected in the future. This rail initiative was a separate project and not necessarily dependent on the widening of I-93.
- Comment. Moni Sharma: The rail corridor options are new to the I-93 study. There is dialogue with Massachusetts.
- Jeff. In actually coordinating with Massachusetts, the Department has submitted a draft rail report to identify what is being considered as rail possibilities. The Department will be meeting with Massachusetts once the study is more developed. Massachusetts will be also studying I-93 from Andover to Methuen north to the State line. Coordination between the two states will be required.
- Comment. Concerning sound barriers, how do you determine where and when you construct them? Do you need a certain number of homes in an area? 2/. Do you consider tree buffers and that type of noise protection? 3/. What kind of sound barrier is along Bodwell Road?
- Jeff. Generally, there needs to be a cost/benefit associated with the construction of a sound barrier. Barriers should not exceed \$30,000 for each property mitigated. If the barrier does not cost too much, like an earthen barrier, then perhaps a fewer number of homes would qualify. 2/. Tree screens do not really provide much noise protection. The perception is that if trees are planted they will help reduce the noise. In actuality when measured with a sound meter, the trees do not really reduce the noise, but they will hide the highway, which seems to provide some type of relief. 3/. I believe it is a concrete post with wood plank.
- Comment. Will the Department be considering shared routes; that is lanes that would be opened for the morning southbound rush hour traffic, then closed, and then reopened for northbound evening rush hour traffic, similar to the southeast expressway.
- Jeff. Yes, that is one possibility, which is generally tied into providing for high occupancy vehicle (HOV) travel (travel for vehicles carrying two or more passengers). The Department will be looking into the feasibility of that option. That option does require a lot of day to day operating costs. Another way to go would be to utilize the fourth lane, as an HOV lane at rush-hour times of the day, and as regular travel lane during non-rush hour periods.
- Comment. Quite a few people commute north. Where would the rail start, in downtown Manchester?
- Jeff. Rail from downtown Manchester would most likely use the west rail corridor connecting to Nashua. For the I-93 corridor, the rail would most likely begin at the airport or at a station near Exit 5. To connect to the Manchester downtown area, rail using the I-93 Corridor or East Rail Corridor would have to go around or under the recently extended runway at the airport.

Comment. How would you get to the train if it were in the median? Would there be a park and ride and shuttle bus?

Jeff. The current thinking is that there would be a park and ride lot adjacent to the highway and a pedestrian bridge over I-93 connecting to the station platform in the median.

Comment. You mentioned that the Department is trying to establish passenger service from Nashua to Lowell. Will the connection to Manchester be better served on that line or the proposed I-93 median line?

Jeff. At this time, it appears that the rail service to downtown Manchester would be via the Nashua line. There are problems using the other lines because of the difficulty in getting around the Manchester Airport. Anything that is done in the I-93 corridor will most likely end at the Airport or Exit 5.

Comment. How will the Department determine which areas will be improved first. Which area gets priority? Will it be for safety reasons or traffic reasons? I would like to see the construction begin in the Salem area.

Jeff. The construction phasing has not been determined yet. Traffic control issues and constructibility issues need to be considered in more detail before making that determination. The first contract may be a contract to build bridges so that in the later phases traffic can be controlled more easily and safely. TSM or interim projects that can be accomplished within the existing right-of-way may be constructed first as a way to reduce or ease congestion in the short term. The Department will be looking at a number of options to ease the congestion now and during construction.

Comment. How far along I-293, will the construction be extended?

Jeff. The Department has a separate project to construct the improvements to I-293. That construction will be underway in 2001. Exactly where the I-93 widening work will end relative to I-293 has not been determined. Plans in that area will be available later this summer.

Comment. Will the Department hold a public meeting for the I-293 project?

Jeff. The Department held a meeting for that project in 1999 and a second meeting will most likely be held prior to construction. The I-293 project begins near Brown Avenue and extends to I-93/I-293 ramp split. The project will widen I-293 to three lanes and provide for longer bridges over Brown Avenue to allow for future widening of Brown Avenue.

Comment. Alderman Pinard: For everyone's information the Department and myself have been doing shows on all of this construction (Bodwell Road, I-293, Granite Street, I-93 widening, Candia Road) and we will continue to do these shows every so often on Channel 9. (Please provide a color plan of the project area for citizens to become acquainted with the project.)